

FORM E - BURIAL GROUND

Assessor's Number
Number

USGS Quad

Area(s)

Form

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL
COMMISSION
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

73-0-1-0

Hanover

HNS.805

Photograph



Locus Map



Town: Hanson

Place (*neighborhood or village*):

Address or Location: 790 High Street
(Fernhill Cemetery)

Name: Old Burial Hill

Ownership: ☐ *Public* ☒ *Private*

Approximate Number of Stones: 235

Earliest Death Date: 1745

Latest Death Date: 1847

Landscape Architect: Not Applicable

Condition: Fair

Acreage: 2.08 Acres

Setting: Located on the tallest hill in the northwest corner of Fernhill Cemetery along the western shores of Wompatuck Pond, the cemetery is set well back from the street at the rear of the parklike mid-nineteenth century cemetery.

Recorded by: Lara Kritzer, JM Goldson
community preservation +
planning

Organization: Hanson Historical
Commission

Date (month / year): July 2018

INVENTORY FORM E CONTINUATION SHEET

HANSON

790 HIGH STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

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☒ Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.

Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.

VISUAL/DESIGN ASSESSMENT

Describe landscape features, gravestone materials, designs, motifs, and symbols that are either common Note any known carvers.

The Old Burial Hill is located in the northeast corner of the Fernhill Cemetery beginning at the top of the cemetery's largest hill and running west down to the Wompatuck Pond. The site is bounded by low fieldstone walls to the north and east. To the south, an unpaved path leads from the Fernhill Cemetery roadway into the original burying ground and serves roughly as the southern boundary of the site. To the west, several rows of gravestones crown the top of the hill which drops steeply down into Fernhill Cemetery. According to local historian Allan Clemons, the cemetery had quarried gravel from the western side of the hill at one time, changing the topography significantly along the western boundary of the original site. The site is largely open field with a few trees along the western edge and scattered around the site.

The Old Burial Hill includes approximately 235 grave stones and a "Potter's Field" of largely unmarked graves in the southeast corner of the site which is still owned by the Town. Today, the majority of the headstones are located along the north and western edges of the property, with a few lone headstones dotting the rolling landscape to the east and south. The uneven distribution of the stones across the site is not necessarily representative of either its original configuration or the location of its surviving graves. According to Clemons, many families chose to relocate their ancestor's graves to the newer Fernhill Cemetery area after it opened, leaving gaps in the original burying ground. In addition, the stones themselves were realigned during the twentieth century. This practice became common during the early and mid-twentieth century, when many cemeteries relocated stones into straight rows to make mowing and maintaining the site easier.

The surviving stones include examples of early slate, marble, and granite headstones as well as two large boulders with copper plaques. In a few locations, newer memorials have been installed by families to replace deteriorating original headstones. Many of the stones showcase remarkable examples of stonecarving craftsmanship with still visible carvings of willows and doves as well as other motifs. The majority of the stones, however, show signs of damage and deterioration. Many stones are covered by moss and lichen, and at least a few stones are being slowly engulfed by surrounding trees. Many of the stones have also succumbed to general wear and weather damage.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Explain religious affiliations, major period of use, and evaluate historical association of this burial ground with the community.

The Old Burial Hill began as a family cemetery on lands owned by the Thomas family. Although it is not clear exactly when the family opened the site to the community use as a cemetery, this appears to have been done quite early in the cemetery's history. Installed on a steep hill referred to in old deeds as "gravelly hill," the cemetery extends along the crest of a ridge and is divided by a small valley into two distinct knolls. On the northern knoll is the site's earliest headstone from 1745 for Isaac Cushing, age two. The southern knoll contains

INVENTORY FORM E CONTINUATION SHEET

HANSON

790 HIGH STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

	HNS.80
	5

the graves of the Thomas family and for the parish's original minister. In the following years, members of the Bonney, Cushing, Josselyn, Howland, Torrey, Philips, and other prominent families were laid to rest at this time.

Lieutenant Isaac Thomas (1682-1731) was the first owner of the property and is believed to be responsible for establishing the original cemetery plot. Upon Isaac's death in 1731, the land passed to his son, Captain Edward Thomas, who served as the first clerk of the West Parish of Pembroke (now Hanson) and continued to allow the public use of the site as a cemetery. Charles passed the property to his own son, Nathaniel Thomas, at his death in 1802. On March 3, 1804, after nearly 60 years of using the Thomas' land as the town's burying ground, a vote was taken "that the standing committee agree with Nathaniel Thomas for a piece of land for a Burying-place and take a security for the same."¹

On April 1804, Nathaniel Thomas of Pembroke sold the land for \$20.00 to Oliver Whitton, Thomas Hobart, and Isaac B. Thomas, the standing committee appointed by the Second Parish in Pembroke as noted above. The initial area was just over two acres as recorded in the deed for the purchase of the site.

The History of Fern Hill Cemetery notes that graves in the Old Burial Hill, or Old Burying Ground, were generally installed at random and often in a haphazardly fashion. Burials are believed to have begun in the flatter northeast corner of the site and to have moved south over time. However, there is also evidence that new individual graves were installed wherever the land was thought to be vacant, often disturbing older gravesites in the process. This arrangement eventually led to the creation of the more formal Fern Hill Cemetery. The first survey of the site was completed in 1821 shortly after the town was incorporated. According to a later plan of the existing Fern Hill Cemetery, the land between the Old Burial Hill and High Street was purchased in 1847 for its express use as a new cemetery. Additional plots of land to the north and south would be added to the cemetery from 1879 to 1963, giving the cemetery its existing configuration.

At a Town Meeting on September 30, 1847, residents approved the installation of stone walls along the north and east side of Old Burial Hill, effectively closing the long standing entrance to the area and rerouting it to through the new Fern Hill Cemetery. Fern Hill Cemetery was established as a non-profit entity separate from the Town, and in its early years many residents relocated their family plots, and family members, from Old Burial Hill to the more organized new cemetery. The Town continued to own Old Burial Hill until 1937, when Town Meeting agreed to deed the lot to the Fern Hill Cemetery Corporation with the exception of the longstanding Potter's Field area in the southeast corner of the site, which was held back from the sale and is still owned by the Town today. Since 1937, Old Burial Hill has been owned and maintained by the Cemetery Corporation.

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¹ History of Plymouth County, Page 350

INVENTORY FORM E CONTINUATION SHEET

HANSON

790 HIGH STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

	HNS.80
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INVENTORY FORM E CONTINUATION SHEET

HANSON

790 HIGH STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

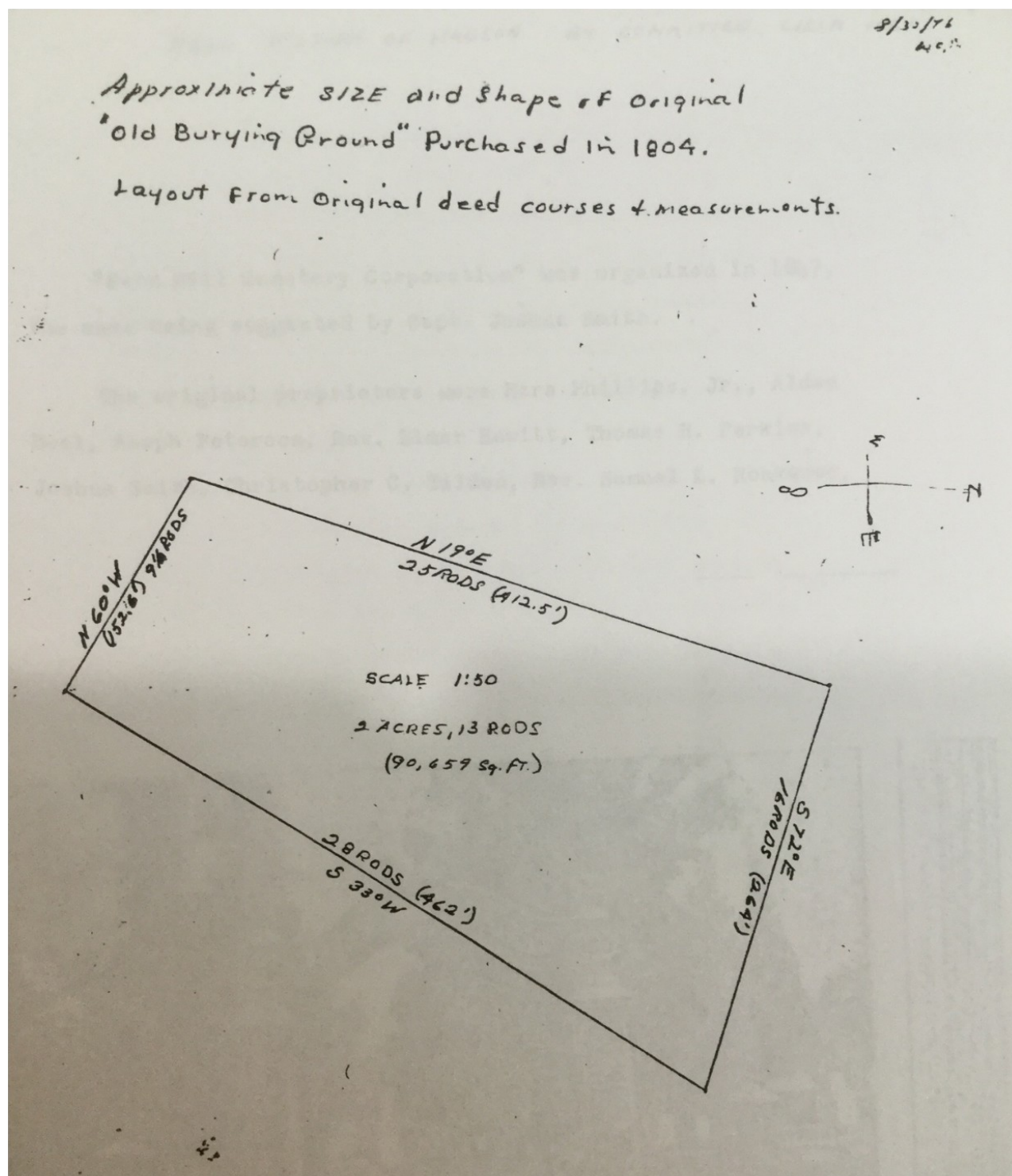
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220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125



HNS.80

5



Drawing of Old Burial Hill based on 1804 Deed for the Town's purchase of the site. Image taken from Darsch's *History of Fern Hill Cemetery*.

Continuation sheet 4

INVENTORY FORM E CONTINUATION SHEET

790 HIGH STREET

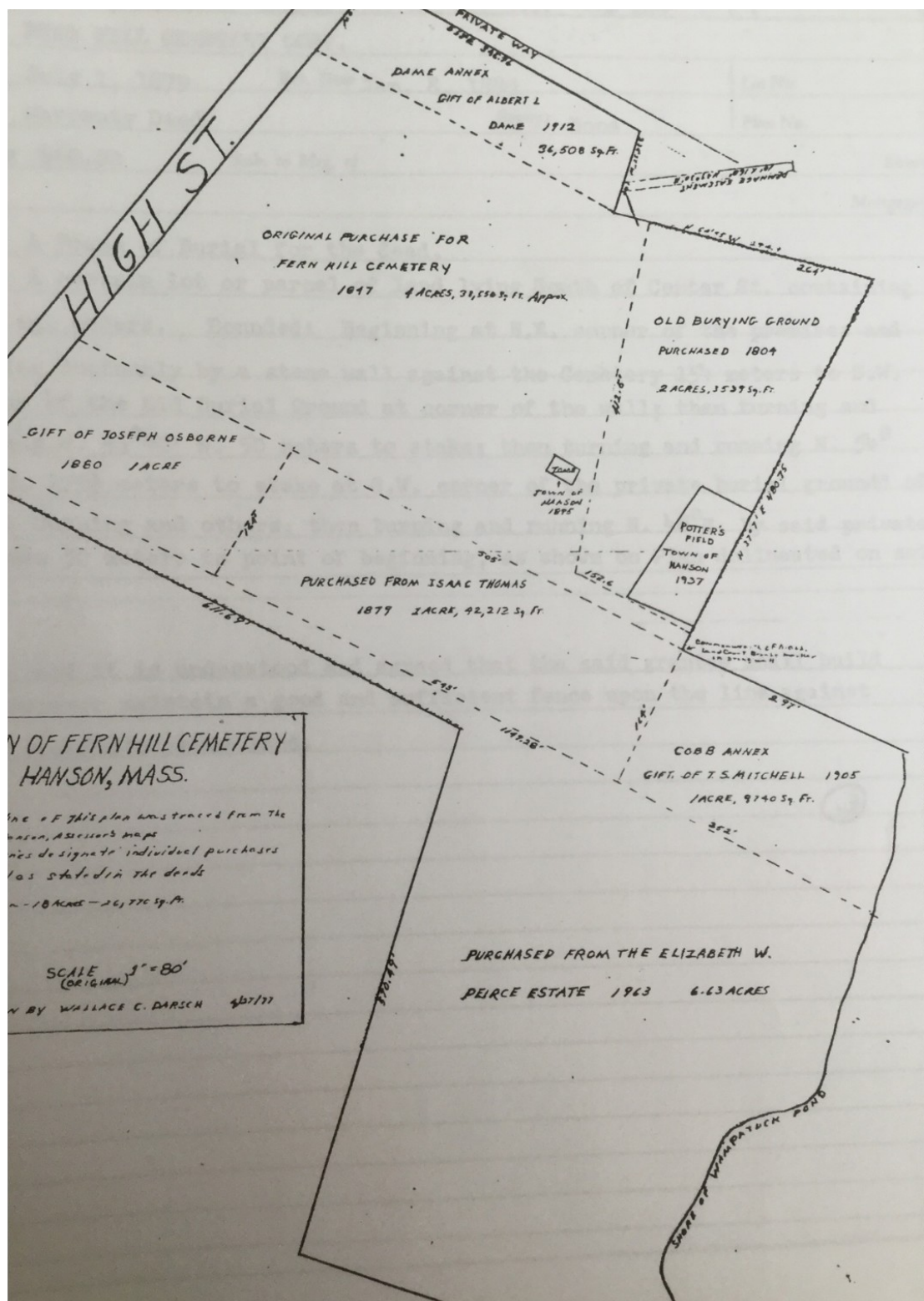
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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

HNS.80
5



Drawing by Wallace C. Darsch of the Plan of Fern Hill Cemetery. Image taken from Darsch's *History of Fern Hill Cemetery*.

INVENTORY FORM E CONTINUATION SHEET

790 HIGH STREET

HANSON

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

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HNS.80
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Memorial installed for Rev. Gad Hitchcock, first pastor Old Burial Hill Cemetery from northeast corner of site.



Gravestones at center of site.



INVENTORY FORM E CONTINUATION SHEET

HANSON

790 HIGH STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Area(s) Form No.

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

	HNS.80
	5

Old Burial Hill from northeast corner of site.

Example of surviving stone.

National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- ☒ Individually eligible ☐ Eligible **only** in a historic district
- ☐ Contributing to a potential historic district ☐ Potential historic district

Criteria: ☒ **A** ☐ **B** ☒ **C** ☐ **D**

Criteria Considerations: ☐ **A** ☐ **B** ☐ **C** ☐ **D** ☐ **E** ☐ **F** ☐ **G**

Statement of Significance by Lara Kritzer

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

Hanson's first town cemetery is eligible for individual listing on the National Register under Criteria A for its association with the early settlement of Hanson and its development from a village of Pembroke into a town in its own right. The site is also eligible under additional criteria D as it holds the graves of nearly all of Hanson's founders and first families, including many who served in the Revolutionary War and later for the Union Army during the Civil War.

Further consideration is needed to determine whether the Old Burial Hill should be recommended as a separate site or as a portion of a future National Register nomination for the Fern Hill Cemetery as a whole.